

THE CHRISTIAN'S PLACE IN THE WORLD
MATTHEW 5:13-16

INTRO.:

1. Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with a description of the character his followers must have.
 - a. In the Beatitudes which we have been studying over the last several weeks, Jesus described the qualities which are the foundation upon which the Christian's life is built.
 - b. In Matt. 5:3-9 Jesus called His followers to a radically new way of life.
 - c. But as He ended this section, and challenge, He gave us a warning.
 - d. Eventually those who practice the attitudes of the Beatitudes will suffer opposition and persecution from the world (Mt. 5:10-12).
 - e. And since the church (Christians) is to be completely different from the world, we can expect opposition.
2. Based upon this fact Jesus used two illustrations from everyday Palestinian life to describe this opposition and what our responsibility to the world is.
 - a. First, Jesus talked about salt.
 - 1) Salt in Jesus' day was gathered from the marshes and rocks around the Dead Sea.
 - 2) This salt was used as collected and thus contained many impurities.
 - 3) The salt would eventually lose its taste because of the impurities.
 - 4) Disposal of this useless salt became a problem.
 - a) It could not be cast into the fields because it would ruin the soil.
 - b) So the best way to dispose of it was to throw it out on the road where it would be ground under foot and destroyed.
 - b. Second, Jesus talked about light.
 - 1) Like salt, light was a familiar part of their daily lifestyle.
 - 2) The houses of that day, especially those of poor people, had one room with few windows.
 - 3) For light, people had to use an oil lamp.
 - a) This was basically a bowl with a cover that had a hole in the top for a wick.
 - b) The lamp was placed on a small shelf that extended from a pillar or the wall.
 - c) In this way it would give light to the whole household.
 - 4) Since light was so precious, Jesus showed how ridiculous it would be to put a bowl over it.
 - a) A light under a bowl was useless.
 - b) No light could be seen, and eventually the lamp would go out.
3. This AM I want us to go back and look at what Jesus was teaching us about our place as Christians in the world by using these 2 illustrations: Matt. 5:13-16: (Read).
4. As we go back and look at these verses I want us to break our study down into three areas.

LESSON:

- I. 1st: In this passage Jesus reveals to us something about the nature of the world, and God's view of sinful man.
 - A. In the metaphor of salt, Jesus clearly implies that the world is full of death & decay.
 1. The world has a petrifying disease which we call sin.
 - a. Sin is running rampant in the world, leading people to do that which is bad or evil.
 - b. Because of sin the world is corrupt, offensive, polluted, decaying, and dying.
 2. Notice a few passages where this description of the world is given:
 - a. Psa. 14:1-3: (Read).
 - b. Jere. 17:9: "*The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?*"
 - c. Rom. 3:10-12: "*As it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one. "*"
 - d. Rom. 1:18-25: (Read).

3. After reading these passages we can understand God's view of the world, and why Jesus called for us to be "*the salt of the earth.*"
 - a. Simply, the world is lost and desperately needs the influence that Christians can have.
 - b. And just as salt works because it is fundamentally different from that to which it is applied, so also we must be different from the world if we are going to have a saving influence on it.
 - c. Only when we are different, can we really have the effect that Jesus had in mind.

B. In the metaphor of light, Jesus clearly implies that the whole world lies in darkness.

1. Again, due to sin, man's mind is darkened to the truths of God's word.
2. The Bible describes this darkness in various ways:
 - a. The dominion of darkness (Col. 1:13; 2 Pet. 2:9).
 - b. The darkens of sin (Rom. 3:9).
 - c. The darkness of superstition and ignorance (Eph. 4:17-18).
 - d. And ultimately they are traveling toward outer darkness (Matt. 25:30), and the nether gloom of darkness (Jude 6, 13).
3. Thus, when Jesus said His disciples are to be "*the light of the world,*" He was emphasizing the tremendous contrast there must be between our lives and those of the world.
4. Jesus was emphasizing the tremendous responsibility we have to shine out into the world that is darkened by sin.

C. Thus understanding God's view of the world, we can better understand Jesus' intent when He said, "*You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world?*"

II. 2nd: This passage reveals to us something about the nature of God's people.

--To understand what Jesus was teaching we need to understand something about the nature of salt and light.

A. Let us begin by looking at salt:

--Several things we notice about the nature of salt and how it applies to Christians:

1. Salt is a preservative – rubbed into meat it keeps the meat from decaying, or becoming inedible.
 - a. Just as salt functions as a preservative, so also we are to function as a preservative in the world.
 - b. Just as salt must come in contact with meat to preserve it, so also we must have contact with the world if we are going to preserve it from the rotteness of sin.
 - 1) But as I have already mentioned, the way we do this is by being different from the world in which we live.
 - 2) It is by living according to a different standard than the worlds.
 - c. ILLUST.:
 - 1) You can see this effect when a godly man or woman makes his or her presence known to the world.
 - 2) Often, the fact that a godly person is present stops the trend toward sin and worse sin.
 - 3) People will clean up their language, or at least stop and think when they know a true Christian is around.
 - d. Notice the preserving influence a few Godly people had on the world around them:
 - 1) Noah – saved mankind.
 - 2) Abraham – pleaded with God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if just 5 righteous people could be found in the two cities (Gen. 18:20-32).
 - 3) Moses – pleaded with God not to destroy the nation of Israel when they sinned.
 - 4) In God's dealings with wicked Jerusalem: Jere. 5:1: "*Roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and look now, and take note. And seek in her open squares, If you can find a man, If there is one who does justice, who seeks truth, then I will pardon her.*"
- e. Who knows but that it may be our preserving influence as Christians is all that is keeping our nation from falling.

2. Salt is an antiseptic – dissolved in a glass of water, it helps kill the germs that cause a sore throat.
 - a. You don't gargle the salt water to stay healthy; you gargle to kill the germs.
 - b. As Christians, we are to function as an antiseptic in the world that is suffering with the disease of sin.
 - 1) We do this by living faithfully to God.
 - 2) You can see this effect when our involvement in the lives of others not only stops their trend toward sin, but also turns them back toward God.
3. Salt is a seasoning agent – sprinkled on bland food, it helps to enhance or bring out the flavor.
 - a. Salt by itself does not taste good.
 - 1) But when salt is applied to food it brings out the flavor..
 - 2) Salt can make food that is blah, palatable: Job. 6:6: "*Can something tasteless be eaten without salt, Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?*"
 - b. As Christians, we are to have a seasoning influence in the world.
 - 1) In a world without God, life becomes dull and bland and causes people to seek the ever-elusive thrill.
 - 2) Without God, man is on a never-ending quest for meaning and satisfaction.
 - 3) But, like salt, we can have an influence that will change people's lives.
 - a) Through our influence we can show people how their life can have value, meaning and purpose.
 - b) By our influence we can show people that there is an alternative to the constant downward spiral of despair.
4. While there are many other comparisons we could make between our influence and salt, these 3 are enough to show that as a Christian, I have a responsibility to live in such a way that I am influencing those I come in contact with daily for good.

B. Now let us look at light.

--Several things we notice about the nature of light and how it applies to Christians:

1. Light reveals and illuminates.
 - a. Eph. 5:13: "*But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.*"
 - b. ILLUST.: Car lights reveal the road ahead of us at night.
 - 1) They show us any objects in front of us.
 - 2) They keep us from running off the road, over something, or killing ourselves.
 - c. In the same way a Christian's life should:
 - 1) Reveal to the world the pathway to heaven so that others can find it.
 - 2) Light it up in such a way that others can see any pitfalls.
 - 3) And this can only be done when we let our light shine out to illuminate the pathway for others.
2. Light banishes darkness.
 - a. In Gen 1:3 when God said, "*Let there be light,*" what happened?
 - 1) Where darkness ruled, light appeared and darkness was no more.
 - 2) Simply, light and darkness cannot dwell in the same place at the same time.
 - b. In the same way, where a true Christian goes, a difference will be seen.
 - 1) When our missionaries have gone overseas into pagan cultures the darkness of sin, superstition, etc. has been dispensed.
 - 2) But what about here in America? Or more specifically, here in Montrose?
 - a) Is our presence as a Christian being felt in this community?
 - b) Have we allowed our light to shine out into a community that is in the darkness of sin?
 - c) Has our life impacted the lives of those around us – those we work with, spend time with, etc. - those who are living in the darkness of sin?
 - d) Has our life made a difference in their life?

3. Light guides.
 - a. In Matt. 2:9 we find that the wise men were guided to Christ by the light from a certain star,
 - 1) It showed them the direction they needed to go.
 - 2) It led them to Christ.
 - b. As lights, we must also be instrumental in guiding souls to Christ and showing them the way to salvation.
 - 1) It is interesting that in Phil. 2:16, immediately after Paul had said that we are to shine out as lights to a crooked and perverse world, he told how this occurs.
 - 2) It is by " *Holding fast to the words of life...* "
 - c. As a Christian I am not only responsible for teaching the lost about Christ, but also for living in such a way that I shine out, guiding others to Jesus.
4. Light warns of danger.
 - a. A blinking yellow light, or a red light on a broadcast tower warns that danger is present.
 - b. In the same way, Christians should be warning others of danger.
 - c. We need to warn them of the danger of:
 - 1) Worldliness (1 John 2:15-17).
 - 2) Denominationalism (1 Cor. 1:10; John 17:20-21).
 - 3) Failure to obey Christ (2 Thess. 1:7-9).
 - 4) And the danger of being unfaithful to Christ (Heb. 6:4-6).
 - d. Just as a warning light is worthless if it is not working, so also a Christian is worthless if they are not warning others of the dangers of sin.

III. Finally, this passage reveals to us what happens to the Christian who exerts a bad influence; that is, one who loses their saltiness, or hides their light.

--In our text Jesus warns us that there is a real danger that as Christians we can lose our saltiness, or hide our light.

- A. As we look at what Christ said there are some questions we are led to ask:
 1. What happens to salt when it is no longer different from that to which it is applied?
 2. What happens to a light bulb that no longer gives light?
 3. What happens when salt no longer functions as salt?
 4. What happens when a flashlight ceases to shine guiding our steps on a dark night up on a mountain cliff?
 5. NOTE: We all know the answer – It is useless, and only good to be thrown away.
- B. Thus Jesus warns us that just as salt can cease to function as salt, and light can cease to illuminate a room, so also our influence can cease to exert a positive influence on those around us.
 1. --How can this happen?
 2. Basically, the only way salt can lose its saltiness is for it to become mixed with other elements, which render it ineffective.
 - a. This can happen by accident – Salt left out in the weather where it is exposed to the rain and sun will become diluted or mixed.
 - b. Or it can happen on purpose – We can change the quality of salt by mixing it with foreign chemicals.
 - c. The point is that the same thing can happen to a Christian.
 - 1) Christ has called for us to be different from the world – the message of the Beatitudes.
 - 2) But when we seek to become like the world, following their practices, we will begin to lose our saltiness, or begin to put a bushel over our light.
 - a) When we dress like the world; talk like the world; follow the mannerisms of the world; or start acting like the world, then a change has taken place.
 - b) If we allow these worldly impurities into our lives we will lose our ability to influence (season and guide) those we come in contact with (1 Cor. 15:33).
 - c) James warned: Ja. 4:4: "*You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*"

- d. When we fail to remain pure we can no longer preserve, purify, guide, or influence for good the world, because we have become just like them.
- C. Such salt, or such light is useless to both God and man, and it is good only to be thrown out.
- 1. Simply, a citizen in God's kingdom can lose their reward if they choose to live like and become like the world.
 - 2. Thus the questions we must constantly be asking ourselves are:
 - a. Have I lost my saltiness?
 - b. Have I hid my light under the bushel of worldliness?
 - c. Have I become so much like the world that I have lost my influence on those in the world I am around each day?
 - d. Do those I come in contact with daily, even know that I am a Christian?

CONC.:

- 1. As Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount He comes right at us with both barrels.
 - a. In these first few verses He challenges us with a totally different way of life than what the world has to offer.
 - b. He pulls no punches in telling us that if we are going to follow Him it will demand a tremendous change in our life.
 - c. Thus He says we must be the salt that is influencing, and the light that is shining so that God is being glorified, or else we are worthless to Him and His kingdom.
- 2. We are called to change the world in which we live.
 - a. But the only way we can do that is by being different from the world.
 - b. We do it by making the attitudes of the Beatitudes a part of our daily lives.
- 3. Here is where we must do some honest soul-searching, and ask ourselves:
 - a. Is there a clear distinction between my life and that of the people I live around and with whom I work and associate?
 - b. Can those around me see God in my life and my desire to please Him?
 - c. And most importantly, is my life such that when others see me they are led to glorify and obey God?